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*The Dramatic Art of James M. Barrie*







THE DRAMATIC ART

OF

JAMES M. BARRIE

BY

MILDRED CAROLYN KUCH

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THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN

ENGLISH

---

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

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.....June 1.....1920..

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

.....Mildred Carolyn Auch.....

ENTITLED.....The Dramatic Art of James Barrie.....

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

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.....College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.....

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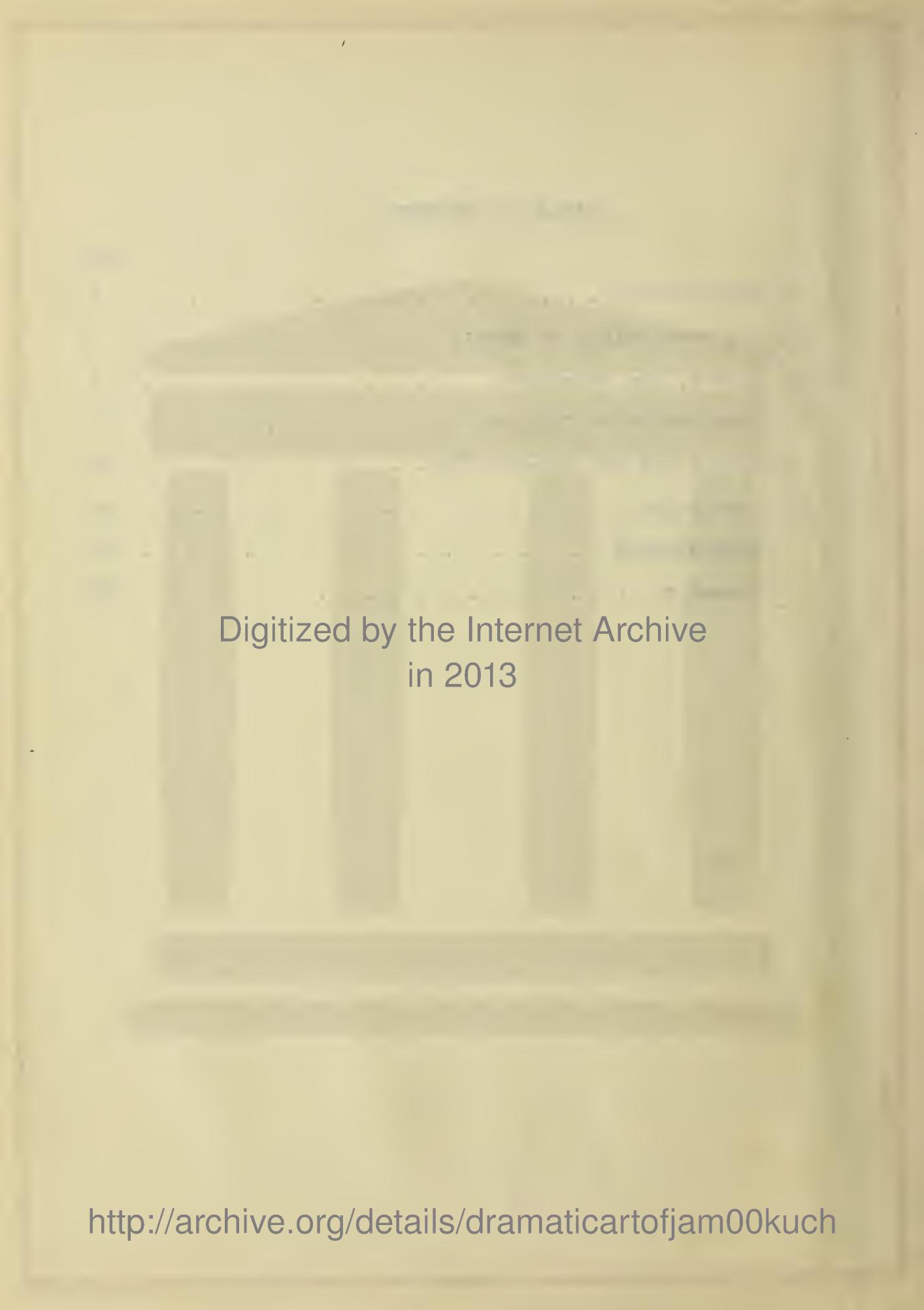
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## THE DRAMATIC ART OF JAMES M. BARRIE

### I. INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century, which, dramatically speaking, began so unfavorably, after a century devoted almost entirely to the advancement of prose writing, saw, in its turn, the opening of a greater era in the dramatic history of England than had existed since the close of the seventeenth century.

Practically no plays had been written since Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer, (1773), and Sheridan's The Rivals, (1775), and School for Scandal, (1777), had won their great success, until, between 1860-1870, Tom Robertson appeared, with Ours, Caste, Society, and other plays. Of these, Caste is, now, practically the only survivor.

Robertson may be said to have been the founder of the present-day English drama, for, although he is only relatively realistic, as compared with standards of today, yet this realism is a long stride in the direction of that developed later by Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy and others. After Robertson's time, drama was continued through the efforts of Pinero, Jones, Wilde, and Barker, and, later, of Shaw, Galsworthy, and countless other less important writers, who have helped re-establish English drama in its former place of eminence.

In the work of all these dramatists there is evident a unifying touch, due, perhaps, in most part, to the spirit of the age, but each man has given a certain definite, individual contri-



bution to the drama. Pinero is "the first living English master of dramatic technique."<sup>1</sup> He pays much more attention to the mechanics of the play, than to characterization. He confines himself almost entirely to comedy and melodrama dealing with polite society, so-called.

Henry Arthur Jones is very closely connected with Pinero; indeed, these two men have been called the "Siamese twins" of English drama. Like Pinero, Jones is a master technician; like him, also, he has written both comedy, melodrama, and more serious plays. But, while Pinero has restricted his field of endeavor to that of polite society, Jones has taken his subjects from every class and condition of life.

Shaw has for many years been an important figure in modern English life, not only as a dramatist, but also as a politician, critic and novelist. By some people he is thought to be merely an excellent poseur, because of his habit of always appearing to be directly opposed to whatever opinion was held by the majority of people. Whether or not the accusation of insincerity is false, he has, by means of his denunciatory attitude, helped to arouse people from their self-satisfied state, and made them think to some purpose. His main idea, in writing, has been to preach against the shams which envelop our everyday life. To this end, his dramatic career has been devoted mainly to inveighing against convention, which, he declares, is the death of originality and common sense. In his determinedly naïve fashion, he wages war upon the world, standing out, the one against the many, and stoutly insisting upon "the negative of the commonly accepted."<sup>2</sup> He, too, like most of

1. Andrews, Charlton, The Drama Today, p. 113.

2. Ibid., p. 136.



his contemporaries, is interested primarily in problem plays, but only in so far as through them he can preach against the tiresome commonplaceness of everyday life.

Granville Barker, a younger and somewhat less striking dramatist than Shaw, is nevertheless something of a disciple of the older man. Although his name is generally associated with those of Pinero and Jones, he has very little of their instinct for the theatre. His plays often lack unity, because of the inclusion of much material unnecessary for the furthering of the plot. He is decidedly modern in his very rationalistic attitude toward life, in the "advanced" ideas of his heroines in regard to sex problems, and in his character drawing.

John Galsworthy is almost exclusively a writer of problem plays, but instead of treating sex questions, as Barker usually does, he deals almost exclusively with social wrongs. He is a pessimist, whose strongest feeling seems to be a realization of the injustice of society toward the individual; and in all of his plays he emphasizes some phase of that feeling.

"It is a curious and doubtless significant fact" says Andrews,<sup>1</sup> "that one blanket classification which covers the largest part of the work of most of these playwrights is that of the 'problem play'." This is for the most part true; but there is at least one exception to this "blanket classification." This one exception is Sir James Matthew Barrie, who, Mr. Andrews says, "is concerned rather with the comedy of manners and the fantastic."<sup>2</sup> With Barrie an entirely new element entered into English drama,--an element

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1. Andrews, Charlton, The Drama Today, p. 106.

2. Ibid, p. 106.



curiously un-English, and yet more closely related to English drama than to that of any other country. There is in Barrie a touch of something which does not entirely belong to this workaday world of ours. He it is who "transplanted fantasy to its home in the British Isles, and made it speak English (slightly tinged here and there with Scotch)."<sup>1</sup>

Since Barrie has been so successful in the realm of fantasy, there have been many attempts to imitate him; and much of the drama recently produced has been of the fantastic type, of which he is the literary father. But so far no one has been able even to approach the position of this shy Scot, whose popularity is ever a constant source of surprise to himself.

## II. THE PERSONALITY OF BARRIE

During the "storm and stress" of the early nineteenth century, the pure poetic beauty of Shelley's Skylark came with soothing touch in the midst of all the fevered revolutionary poetry of the period. In the same way, in this intensely realistic age, we turn with a sign of relief to plays such as Barrie's, which take us away from the heavy problem plays with which we are so closely surrounded, and lead us into a world in which we forget our worries, and, transformed by the magic touch of Barrie's wand, play in the fairyland which he creates by dint of his own charming personality.

Some one has characterized Barrie as being a man with an "elusive personality"<sup>2</sup>--a phrase which very aptly expresses the subtle qualities of this playwright who needs only to announce a

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1. Dickinson, T.H., The Contemporary Drama of England, p. 230.

2. Williams, John D. The Charm that is Barrie, Century Magazine, October, 1915, p. 804.



new play, to have it acclaimed by the reading world and by the usually harsh critics, alike. His shyness and reticence constitute no small part of his likable qualities, and many and amusing are the anecdotes related, concerning the ways by which Barrie has, at various times, escaped from the clutches of would-be admirers, with a truly Scotch horror of having a "fuss" made over him. Mr. Williams has told of a Burns celebration at which Barrie was to preside:

He (Barrie) took the chair ..... and then kept to it firmly. Thruout the entire proceedings he did not utter a single word, but remained as if glued to the horribly conspicuous chair, but inwardly thoroughly amused at the expressions on the faces of all about him, which told dismally of his failure as a presiding officer.<sup>1</sup>

At another time he was in attendance at a journalists' banquet at which three editors were present, and where he made what is generally considered to be his longest public speech,--for it is said that journalistic conclaves always serve to open up the innermost recesses of this retiring man's heart. Mr. Barrie, being pressed for a speech, finally arose and said, "Well, this is the verry furst time I've ever had dinner with three editors." Then he sat down.<sup>2</sup> It is very typical of the man, that even while rebelling at the custom which insists upon dragging forth timid authors in order that a greedy public may feast its eyes upon them, he derives much inward amusement from the discomfiture which his unusual attitude causes his associates. It is not at all natural - this refusal to be worshipped. It is so very unlionlike! But then, it

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1. Williams, John D. The Charm that is Barrie, Century Magazine, October, 1915, p. 804.

2. Retold from above.



is very Barrie-esque, and that is answer enough.

"Humor's what gies the nip to speaken'," says Tommas Haggart, Barrie's mouth-piece in A Window in Thrums. And it is certain that Barrie's humor does indeed give the "nip" to his "speakin'." On account of his shyness, Barrie does not always show this quality to best advantage, when face to face with people. But in his writings, where he is sufficiently detached from reality to be unself-conscious, his humor is at its best. It is of a particularly pleasing kind,--one which evades classification, refusing to be pinned down and examined closely. It is not a boisterous, "slap-stick" kind of humor, nor has it the vigor of Mark Twain's buoyant cheerfulness. It is, rather, a delicate, appealing thing, born of a sensitive, particularly fine nature. His is a humor in which the ready tears are always felt, just behind the smile, as the sun is seen behind the clouds on a rainy spring day. This mingling of humor and pathos, so common in Barrie's plays, is well illustrated by the scene from What Every Woman Knows, in which Maggie's father asks, "What is charm, exactly, Maggie?" and Maggie replies:<sup>1</sup>

Oh, it's - it's a sort of bloom on a woman. If you have it, you don't need to have anything else; and if you don't have it, it doesn't matter what else you have. Some women, the few, have charm for all; and most have charm for one. But some have charm for none.

This speech, alone, touches the very depths of pathos, taking us into the secret recesses of Maggie Shand's heart,--her deep longing for life, love and romance. But the noble response of her brothers to this speech, is fully as humorous as it is pathetic.

JAMES, (shouting) I have a sister that has charm.

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1. What Every Woman Knows, pp. 14 and 15.



MAGGIE, No, James, you haven't.

JAMES, (rushing at her with a watch and chain), Ha'e,  
Maggie?

DAVID, Maggie, would you like a silk?

And we smile, a wry yet amused little smile, at the depth of masculine ignorance, which thinks to compensate a woman for lack of that all-powerful fetish, charm, by the gift of a watch and chain, or a silk dress.

One of the most captivating elements in the make-up of the man Barrie is the quaint, fairylike quality of his imagination. For example, David's idea concerning the birth of children is as fantastically beautiful as Maeterlinck's conception of the land of unborn children:

David knows that all children in our part of London were once birds in the Kensington Gardens, and that the reason there are bars on nursery windows, and a tall fender by the fire, is because very little people sometimes forget that they no longer have wings, and try to fly away through the window, or up the chimney.<sup>1</sup>

In a similar tone, and embodying the very essence of the Barrie who is so greatly loved, is the remark of David, who is being taken to the "Junior Old Fogies' Club," which necessitates going back six years in time. David, who can claim only five tender years, expresses thus his anxiety in regard to the results of this summary cutting off of time:

"It doesn't make me littler, does it?" he asked, anxiously; and then, with a terrible misgiving: "It won't make me too little, will it, father?"--by which he meant (explains Barrie) that he hoped it would not do for him altogether.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The Little White Bird, p. 21.  
2. Ibid, p. 10.



Mr. Dickinson has, perhaps, summed up the whole secret of Barrie's personality better than anyone else, when he says that "the source of his charm and his understanding" is "a spiritual intimacy...that no one else can show";<sup>1</sup> and again "The secret of Barrie.....lies in his ability completely to assimilate the materials of understanding and of art."<sup>2</sup>

### III. BARRIE THE DRAMATIST

Barrie's philosophy of life as expressed in his plays may perhaps be best explained by saying that he has none. He is one of the very few modern dramatists who began to write plays, not to air his own pet theories; but in order to portray, in their simple humanity, real flesh-and-blood men and women whom he genuinely loved. He is a reactionary in the dramatic world, but in a different sense from the usual one. He "has steadfastly refused to indulge in -isms and petrified ideas. He puts forth no formulated disquisitions on human problems".<sup>3</sup> One searches in vain among his plays, for problems, for heated discussions of marriage, or the sex question, or any other of the many fruitful topics which burden present-day drama. He has never had any necessity, or even desire, to "sing of the mud," in order to produce a popular piece of work. He gets as far as possible from morbid, psychological drama, basing his plays, instead, "on wisps of sentiment, of opinion, and of character."<sup>4</sup> In his happy, light-hearted, understanding fashion, he has written his way into popular favor through the hearts,

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1. Dickinson, T.H., The Contemporary Drama of England, p. 231.

2. Ibid, pp. 232 and 233.

3. Ibid, p. 232.

4. Ibid, p. 233.



rather than the minds, of his readers. He has "managed....to follow fancy, while other men were following reason."<sup>1</sup> Even while dealing, as he does in most of his plays, with fundamentally commonplace situations, he gives them a characteristic "Barrie twist" which lifts them out of the realm of the ordinary, into that of fancy, and which imparts to all his work its peculiarly delightful quality. Even a cursory glance at a few of his best-known plays serves to reveal these truths.

Both Alice Sit-By-The-Fire and Quality Street, but especially the latter, show Barrie in the mood in which he displays his most intuitive understanding of the feminine mind and heart. They are studies of individuals, while The Admirable Crichton and What Every Woman Knows, the two plays by which Barrie is best known, are capable of a more general application to human life, even while apparently treating only one group. Quality Street is fragrant with the odors of an old-fashioned garden - of lavender and rosemary. It is the story, charmingly told, of a girl who is old without ever having been young; a typical girl of the early nineteenth century - one who starves in ladylike poverty, while making valiant efforts to maintain herself by conducting a school, at the same time pining away for love of a man who she thinks cares nothing for her, but who, in reality, because he considers her so far above him, is afraid to offer himself to this genteelly old-fashioned young woman. Of course, in the end, the man in the case, Captain Brown, returns, after a long absence, finds out how matters stand, and rescues the lady from her unhappy situation. But in spite of our faith that everything will eventually "come out right," there are moments when

1. Dickinson, T.H., The Contemporary Drama of England, p. 232.



our hearts ache for gentle Miss Susan Throssel, and her sister, Miss Phoebe. There have probably been many stories based on this same theme - a young woman pining away for love; but few, if any, have been treated with such childlike simplicity and naivete' as this one. Barrie has seen into the hearts of these retiring women with a penetration as great as that of our own New England character-painter Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. The typical Barrie touch is given to the story by such incidents as the schoolroom scene:

MISS SUSAN.....Phoebe, if a herring and a half cost three ha' pence, how many for eleven pence?

PHOEBE (instantly). Eleven.

MISS SUSAN. William Smith says it is fifteen; and he is such a big boy, do you think I ought to contradict him? May I say there are differences of opinion about it? No one can be really sure, Phoebe.

PHOEBE. It is eleven. I once worked it out with herrings. (Soutly) Susan, we must never let the big boys know that we are afraid of them. To awe them, stamp with the foot, speak in a ferocious voice, and look them unflinchingly in the face. (Then she pales.) Oh, Susan, Isabella's father insists on her acquiring algebra.

MISS SUSAN. What is algebra exactly; is it those three-cornered things?

PHOEBE. It is  $x$  minus  $y$  equals  $z$  plus  $y$  and things like that. And all the time you are saying they are equal, you feel in your heart, why should they be?<sup>1</sup>

In Alice Sit-By-The-Fire, Barrie pictures the tragi-comedy of a woman who wishes to remain young; who is really young in spirit, but who, returning from India after a long separation from her children, finds that she is forced to accept age, both in order to "keep ahead" of her young son and daughter, and to satisfy their

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1. Quality Street, p. 40.



youthfully imperious demands for a parent who looks the part.

One of Barrie's most popular plays is What Every Woman Knows, a study of one woman who is supposed to typify the many. It tells the story of a woman, who, lacking the gift of charm, marries a man who does not return her love, but proceeds to entangle himself with a second woman. "A typical 'triangle' story!" you say. In the bare outline of the plot this, of course, is true. But when one considers what use Barrie made of the usual "eternal triangle," one gains a renewed impression of this writer's variation from type. Maggie Shand, always meek and submissive before her husband's superior intelligence, makes herself so indispensable to him, mentally, that, after being away from her a few days, with the woman he thinks he loves, he finds that Maggie was right in what she said that every woman knew,--that is, that "Every man who is high up loves to think that he has done it all himself; and the wife smiles, and lets it go at that."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most interesting features of any writer's work is his method of characterization. It is fascinating to compare the different degrees and kinds of subtlety with which various dramatists display the children of their pens before the eyes of the spectators. In the case of Barrie the interest in his characterization arises from the consummate cleverness with which, by one stroke of the pen, he creates in our mind's eye an impression of the person of whom he is speaking. He seldom describes with any degree of clearness the personal appearance of a character. But with enviable acuteness he hits upon some little peculiarity or weakness in the make-up of the person described; and by constantly referring, in humorous fashion,

to this foible, by making us see the character in the light of this

1. What Every Woman Knows, p. 159.



failing, the personality of the character is much more firmly impressed upon our imagination than would have been the case if we had read a catalog description of the person's appearance. Thus we are told very little about Lady Sybil Lazenby, except that she has a "svelte figure," which "gives like a fly-rod." But her drawl, which makes it very difficult for her to talk, under stress of great emotion - a "naughty little impediment," Barrie calls it - tells us a great deal about this charming young aristocrat who was accustomed to carry all opinions before her, by reason of her great attractiveness. In the same way we are made acquainted with the Hon. Ernest Woolley, in The Admirable Crichton, whose chief aim in life seems to be to make epigrams on every possible occasion. Like the utterances of most would-be-original people, Ernest's epigrams are more trite than clever, but they serve as an excellent index to the young man's character. We know without being told, that Ernest is a fatuous, self-complacent young fop, whose only claim to popularity has been established more because of his social position, and the size of his bank roll, than for any personal charms.

The opening scene of Alice Sit-By-The-Fire, in which Amy's room is described, is a delightful commentary on Amy, who is the motivating force of the play:<sup>1</sup>

The moment you open the door of this room.....you are aware, though Amy may not be visible, that there is an uncommonly clever girl in the house. The door does not always open easily, because attached thereto is a curtain which frequently catches in it, and this curtain is hand-sewn (extinct animals); indeed, a gifted woman's touch is everywhere; if you are not hand-sewn you are almost certainly hand-painted, but incompletely, for Amy in her pursuit of the arts has often to drop one in order to keep pace with another. Some of the chairs have

1. Alice Sit-By-The-Fire, p. 3.



escaped as yet, but their time will come..... There are artistic white bookshelves hanging lopsidedly here and there, and they also have pink curtains, no longer than a doll's garments. These little curtains are for covering the parts where there are no books as yet..... There is a cosy corner; also a milking stool, but no cow. The lampshades have had ribbons added to them, and from a distance look like ladies of the ballet."

From this description of the room we get a very good idea as to its youthful owner, and are therefore not much surprised when, later in the play, this young girl with her determinedly artistic tastes, takes the reins of the household into her own hands, even to the extent of giving her mother rules for proper conduct.

No less acutely keen, but more gently sympathetic and less satirical, is Barrie's attitude at the close of the first act in Quality Street, where Phoebe, her heart divided between natural maid-  
only reserve and her love for Valentine Brown, who has gone away without "offering," cries out in grief for what she considers her lost honor:

.....I let him kiss me.

MISS SUSAN. You could not prevent him.

PHOEBE. Yes, I could, I know I could now. I wanted him to do it.....Perhaps he saw I wanted it and did it to please me.....Sister, I could bear all the rest; but I have been unladylike.<sup>1</sup>

And in this sorrowful confession of her lack of gentility, one sees at once the pathos and humor of the life of this gentle, sensitive woman, so far remote from the grim realities of life.

In the construction of his plays Barrie has recourse to certain devices which add greatly to the fanciful charm of the productions, and without a mention of which a study of his plays would be incomplete. One such device is the use of elaborate stage direc-

1. Quality Street, p. 32.



tions, of which Barrie seems unusually fond. There is a tendency, in modern playwriting, to permit stage directions, and long, one-sided conversations of the author with the audience, to take the place of much of the explanation necessary for an understanding of what has preceded the opening of the play. In the French classical drama, this explanation was usually given by two characters - quite frequently servants - at the beginning of the play. Until very recently Barrie was unwilling to allow his plays to be published, for he always wrote for the practical theatre, and felt that in reading the printed page people would lose much of the significance of the play that they would be able to appreciate through the medium of the actors' gestures and tones of voice. When, however, the public began to clamor for the publication of his plays, Barrie devised his famous stage directions as a means of conveying to the reader the essence of his fascinating nature. In his stage directions Barrie talks of every conceivable subject: he introduces the reader to the characters in the play, discusses their past and present, and speculates upon their future history, makes whimsical comments on the settings of scenes, and generally indulges in all sorts of pleasing, inconsequential nothings, which serve to put the practical-minded reader wholly under the writer's spell. Take, for example, the description of the butler, Crichton:<sup>1</sup>

It would not be good taste to describe Crichton, who is only a servant; if to the scandal of all good houses, he is to stand out as a figure in the play, he must do it on his own, as they say in the pantry and the boudoir. We are not going to help him. We have had misgivings ever since we found his name in the title, and we shall keep him out of his rights as long as we can. Even though we softened to him he would not be a hero in these clothes of servitude; and he loves his clothes. How to get him out of them? It

1. The Admirable Crichton, p. 4.



would require a cataclysm. To be an indoor servant at all is to Crichton a badge of honour; to be a butler at thirty is the realization of his proudest ambitions. He is devotedly attached to his master, who, in his opinion, has but one fault, he is not sufficiently contemptuous of his inferiors.

The manner in which the closing scenes of his plays are handled, reveals the unique individuality of Barrie. Most dramatists consider it necessary to end each act on a high emotional pitch, in order to sustain the interest of the reader to the end. But Barrie revolts from the usual custom, and ends his scenes in a calm, quiet manner, in which the characters appear as poised and collected as if they had not just been participants in a thoroughly dramatic scene. At the close of the third act in What Every Woman Knows, Maggie, whose heart is almost breaking with the unrequited love she bears her husband, in spite of her feelings directs the love affair of John and Lady Sybil with such Amazonian vigor that they have almost gained their freedom, and the right to love each other unreservedly, through her efforts, alone; and John, who does not love Maggie as he does Lady Sybil, but is still somewhat perturbed - conscience-stricken, perhaps - by her attitude of cheerful self-sacrifice, closes the situation between them thus:<sup>1</sup>

JOHN (with a queer sort of admiration for his wife), Maggie, I wish I was fond of you.

MAGGIE (heartily), I wish you were,  
John.

(He goes, and she resumes her letter. The stocking is lying at hand, and she pushes it to the floor. She is done for a time with knitting).

There is no loud talking, no melodrama,--nothing but the commonplaces of conversation, spoken in the ordinary tones of voice,

1. What Every Woman Knows, p. 131.



but the dramatic effect of the scene seems immeasurably heightened by the contrast of the subdued, unemotional tones, and the passionate feelings behind them. Again, in The Admirable Crichton, the butler's quiet renunciation of his role as leader of the marooned party, when the English ship comes to their rescue is the very acme of quiet, effective tragedy.

LADY MARY (stretching out her arms to him). Dear Gov., I will never give you up.  
 (There is a salt smile on his face as he shakes he head to her. He lets the cloak slip to the ground. She will not take this for an answer; again her arms go out to him. Then comes the great renunciation. By an effort of will he ceases to be an erect figure; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them.)

CRICHTON (it is the speech of his life).  
 My lady.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. "THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON"

This play shares, with What Every Woman Knows, the honor of being Barrie's best play; indeed, there are many critics who consider it to be even better than its rival. It has been chosen for extended discussion here, rather than any other play, both because it is as truly representative of its author as What Every Woman Knows, and because, since the latter has been much oftener talked and written about, more interest may attach to an analysis of the less-known Admirable Crichton. This is the story of Crichton, the "perfect butler" in the employ of Lord Loam. Even as a servant, Crichton is an imposing personage who has very decided opinions concerning the levelling of class barriers. Unlike the ordinary servant, he resents, as a degrading lowering of the standards of his "betters," the attempts of his master to make his serving-men and

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1. The Admirable Crichton, p. 134.



women feel on a footing of equality with himself. In elaboration of his point of view, he says to his mistresses:<sup>1</sup>

- I am the son of a butler and a lady's-maid - perhaps the happiest of all combinations, and to me the most beautiful thing in the world is a haughty, aristocratic English house, with everyone kept in his place.....

CATHERINE, But Father says if we were to return to nature -

CRICHTON, If we did, my lady, the first thing we should do would be elect a head.

And again, to Lord Loam :<sup>2</sup>

The divisions into classes, my lord, are not artificial. They are the natural outcome of a civilized society. (To Lady Mary.) There must always be a master and servants in all civilized communities, my lady, for it is natural, and whatever is natural is right.

And to Crichton, the natural thing in his existence is that Lord Loam should be the master, and he and his underlings the servants, in this "haughty, aristocratic English house" where "everyone is kept in his place."

But the old order changes. Lord Loam and a party consisting of his daughters, Hon. Ernest Woolley, Mr. Treherne, and two servants, the "Admirable" Crichton and his humble worshipper, Tweeny, are ship-wrecked on a desert island, while on a yachting trip. In this "back to nature" situation, the aristocrats find themselves helpless, and, in their desperate need, turn to the only one in their party who knows how to cope with these primitive conditions. And thus, in accordance with the views he had expressed before - namely, that it was natural and, therefore, right, that there should always be a master and servants in all civilized communities - Crichton accepts, as a natural responsibility, the position of leader in the

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1. The Admirable Crichton, p. 46.

2. Ibid, p. 27.



group of which he was formerly the lowliest member. The family lives on in their island home, directed and controlled by the versatile mind of Crichton who, it appears, has latent ability to rule, which no one had ever suspected before. His rule is even more despotic than that of his employers had been, in the earlier days, but, impressed by the realization of his superior attainments, the rest of the party bow unquestioningly to his authority, which reaches its highest pitch when he assumes a king's royal role. It is when his triumph is at its height, that the sound of a gun, announcing the approach of a ship, is heard; and, upon the arrival of the naval officers at the house, we witness the dramatic metamorphosis of Crichton, from a king to a servant - that magic change which is accomplished by the simple act of his shrinking in stature, and rubbing his hands, one over the other, in tell-tale butler fashion. The last act of the play shows Lord Loam's family after their return to England. Crichton has automatically dropped back into his former position of subservience to those who, returned to a place in which their capabilities are of some avail, have naturally reassumed their leadership.

Thus the whole play seems to prove the thesis that, according to Professor Phelps, in all civilized society "the rulers will be those most fit to rule, regardless of their ancestry, wealth, or social status".<sup>1</sup> Professor Phelps remarks further that "'The Admirable Crichton' expresses the fundamental philosophy of Barrie,-- which is nothing more nor less than democracy."<sup>2</sup> With all due reference to Professor Phelps' learning, it seems to me that there are several things to challenge in this statement. Granting that Barrie's

1. Professor William Lyon Phelps, "The Plays of J. M. Barrie" Yale Review, January, 1920, p. 412.

2. *Ibid.*



philosophy is that of democracy - which of itself is a questionable assumption - the fact remains that the mighty - whether their might be a matter of physical strength, money, or family - is not democratic, but fundamentally aristocratic. Crichton, the man upon whom all the action of the play depends, recognizes the fact that social distinctions have always existed, and will continue to do so till the end of time. He is essentially an aristocrat at heart, who looks askance at any attempts toward equalization of rank; and his employer, more inclined than he to disregard social barriers, is put to shame by this perfect butler's punctilious insistence upon the right of the superior to rule over the inferior.

Although this is the general theme underlying the play, it may well be questioned, in view of Barrie's customary avoidance of the thesis drama, whether any very deep-laid thought on the question is at the basis of this play; whether Barrie ever intended to formulate here any rules of social order; or whether he chose this subject merely in order to give freer rein to his imagination, and to his love of the unusual. Is the play farce, comedy, or tragedy? Professor Phelps says <sup>1</sup> that it is a "profound tragedy." But it is more than this. The subject might easily admit of serious treatment, but true to his own individuality, Barrie has made of it food for his charming fancy; he has played with it until it has emerged from his hands a delightful travesty on human nature and society. It is neither comedy nor tragedy alone, but rather, a combination of the two into a phantasy in Barrie's characteristic "April-weather" style. One such mingling of the comic and pathetic is found in Tweeny's sad confession to Crichton, of the difficulties of trying to be a lady:<sup>2</sup>

1. Professor William Lyon Phelps, "The Plays of J.M. Barrie, Yale Review, January, 1920, p. 412.

2. The Admirable Crichton, pp. 64-65.



TWEENY (in a despairing outburst). I'm full o' vulgar words and ways; and though I may keep them in their holes when you are by, as soon as I'm by myself out they comes in a rush like beetles when the house is dark. I says them gloating-like, in my head - 'Blooming' I says, and 'All my eye,' and 'Ginger', and 'Nothink'; and all the time we was being wrecked I was praying to myself, 'Please be the Lord it may be an island as it's natural to be vulgar on'.

(A shudder passes through Crichton, and she is abject.) That's the kind I am, sir; I'm 'opeless. You'd better give me up. (She is a pathetic, forlorn creature, and his manhood is stirred).

CRICHTON (wondering at himself a little for saying it). I won't give you up. It is strange that one so common should attract one so fastidious; but so it is. (Thoughtfully.) There is something about you, Tweeny, there is a je ne sais quoi about you.

TWEENY (knowing only that he has found something in her to commend). Is there, is there? Oh, I am so glad.

The play is full of delightful little surprises,--turns and twists of conversation and of situations which give it the true Barrie touch. There is, for example, the habit the girls have of always referring delicately to Tweeny's skirt as "it"; or the subduing effect which the mention of a bucket has upon the epigrammatic Ernest.

But perhaps the best, and certainly by far the most tragic scene in the play is the one already mentioned,--the scene of Crichton's renunciation of power, and his quiet return to the life of a servant. Here we have the very essence of the tragic element in this play,--the tragedy which accepts its fate with stoic calm, because it is the working out of "natural" laws.

The first three acts of the play form a complete dramatic unit in themselves. Structurally speaking, it would probably have been better to have omitted the fourth act. But it was necessary for



Barrie to vindicate his original contention that under changing circumstances masters and servants change places according to their ability to meet the new conditions. Therefore he adds the fourth act, to show how naturally the characters adjusted themselves to their new positions, how "natural" and therefore how "right" it was to reduce the erstwhile important Crichton to his earlier servile condition.

The Admirable Crichton illustrates Barrie's ability to choose an interesting situation, tell it entertainingly, and tell it differently from the way in which anyone else would tell it. It represents him most characteristically, in its insight into human nature, and in the sympathy it shows for "just folks"; but it represents him most particularly in his ability to detect, in the most commonplace occurrence, a dramatic possibility, and to make of this possibility an actual fact - a live, amusing, yet appealing and heart-stirring play.

#### V. BARRIE AND THE ONE-ACT PLAY

Aside from his supremacy in the dramatic field in general, Barrie has won a particularly high position among the writers of one-act plays. Indeed, if he had written nothing else, his achievements in this direction would entitle him to serious consideration by modern dramatic critics. Only two groups of his one-act plays, Half Hours and Echoes of the War are to be considered here, but these are, according to Professor Phelps,<sup>1</sup> the best thing that has been done in the realm of the one-act play.

Half Hours, the first of these collections to be published, contains some of Barrie's most popular plays, namely, Pantaloons, Rosalind, and The Twelve-Pound Look. All of these plays are written in

1. Professor William Lyon Phelps, "The Plays of J. M. Barrie," Yale Review, January, 1920, p. 412.



the characteristic "Barrie Style", Rosalind and The Twelve-Pound Look being particularly reminiscent of the author of Alice Sit-By-The-Fire and What Every Woman Knows. Rosalind is the story of an actress who has never been more than twenty-nine years old, because her profession demands that its stars be eternally young. The action of the play hinges on Beatrice Page's rebellious change from a slender, active, beautiful, young woman of twenty-nine, to a "comfy, sloppy, pull-the-curtain, carpet-slipper" kind of person, aged "forty and a bittock". Complications set in when Charles Roche, a young man who is very much in love with the beautiful "Rosalind", appears, and proceeds to unfold himself to the elderly Mrs. Page, who turns out to be Beatrice herself. Toward the characters of this story Barrie adopts an attitude gently bantering, slightly sarcastic, yet wholly sympathetic and understanding. His description of Charles Roche, upon his first appearance at Dame Quickley's house, is quite similar in tone to that of Amy Grey, in Alice Sit-By-The-Fire:

Public School (and the particular one) is written on his (Charles') forehead, and almost nothing else; he has scarcely yet begun to surmise that anything else may be required.....; his vocabulary is scanty, and in his engaging mouth 'priceless' sums up all that is to be known of good or ill in our varied existence.....His brain is quite as good as another's, but as yet he has referred scarcely anything to it.....<sup>I</sup>

For all its amusing and likable qualities, however, Rosalind is deficient in certain details which have made The Twelve-Pound Look the most deservedly popular of Barrie's one-act plays. For it is the most perfectly developed, both as to form and subject, of all his plays.

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1. Half Hours "Rosalind," p. 99.



In order that a one-act play may serve its purpose to best advantage, there have been formulated certain standards by which such plays may be judged. These rules are, briefly, as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- 1) The one-act play must have a clear, arresting and complete theme;
- 2) it must have perfect unity of action; 3) it must be economical in the use of characters; 4) the characterization must be swift and sure; and, 5) action must progress rapidly.

Measured according to these requirements, The Twelve-Pound Look leaves little to be desired. The theme of the play is a man's selfish egotism, which causes his first wife to leave him, and completely crushes the spirit of the woman whom he subsequently marries. The situation treated in the play is that which arises when Kate, the first wife, is sent as a public typist to the home of her former husband, who is about to be made a knight. The action of the play takes place within the space of not more than an hour, but in that time we learn about the people in the play, their hopes and ambitions, their characters - in short, everything concerning them which is necessary to an understanding of them and of the play. The strictest economy is observed in the number of characters, only the three main actors appearing - Harry Sims, his present wife, and Kate. Into the characterization of these three people Barrie has put all the artist's skill which he possesses in such great measure. Harry Sims is portrayed, not only through his own blind, self-satisfied attitude, but through Kate's conversation with him, and through the timid shrinking of his wife, when, on rare occasions, she ventures to disagree with him. As usual, Barrie defends womankind against the abuses of misguided man; and, also as usual, woman -

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1. Dr. H. N. Hillebrand, Lecture Notes on J. M. Barrie.



this time in the person of Kate, the recalcitrant wife - emerges triumphant. One may feel, as some critics do, that Barrie is a trifler unfair to the man, but he presents his case so convincingly that, for the most part, we unite in condemning the man and defending the woman.

Just as Maggie, in What Every Woman Knows, is a profound study of feminine nature, so Harry Sims, the hero of The Twelve-Pound Look, is a keen, truthful, yet whimsical and amusing analysis of the heart and mind of a selfishly proud, egotistical, vainglorious man. Barrie seems to know instinctively the precise reaction a man of Sir Harry's type would make, to any situation, and presents it with perfect accuracy. Sir Harry's evident pleasure over the fact that the servants enjoy giving him the title "Sir"; his nai've rehearsal with his wife, of the ceremony at which he is to become a knight, and his amusing feeling that Kate is reaping a kind of grim justice, in being merely his typist when she might have been Lady Sims, are cases in point. One of the cleverest and most effective touches in this whole play, which abounds in them, comes when Lady Sims asks her husband the price of typewriters and Sir Harry, remembering Kate's admonition, wonders uneasily whether his wife, too, might be acquiring the "twelve-pound look."

Echoes of the War, as the title suggests, is made up of stories based on the recent war. In two of the plays contained in this book, namely, A Well-Remembered Voice, and The New Word, Barrie makes up for his previous strongly partisan attitude toward women, by his keen analysis of the feeling existing between fathers and sons: that feeling which is so deep that it will not permit the display of affection which a mother can employ, but must find expres-



sion in apparent gruffness and severity, assumed only to conceal its real strength.

By far the best in this collection of plays, is The Old Lady Shows Her Medals to which Professor Phelps assigns the honor of being "the most beautiful, most deeply affecting war play" he has yet seen. It is the only play in this group which bears comparison with The Twelve-Pound Look, although the two are quite dissimilar in both form and subject-matter. The story centers about Mrs. Dowey, a London "charwoman and," ("and", in the charring profession, meaning "caretaker, when required."). Mrs. Dowey, who is "Mrs." only by courtesy, has no relatives in the war, nor indeed, has she any relatives at all, but she feels a great desire to have some part in the conflict, because, as she says, "It was everybody's war...except mine....I wanted it to be my war, too."<sup>1</sup> Goaded by this feeling, she picks up, while going about her charring, some discarded envelopes which came from the Front, changes the addresses, and flaunts them before the eyes of her fellow-workers, as letters from her soldier-son. Her pitiful deceit, however, receives a sudden check, upon the unexpected appearance of Private Kenneth Dowey, whose name she had seen in a newspaper, and to whom she has been sending anonymous gifts, in the hope of thus feeling herself to be more a part of things. When the soldier begins to denounce her trickery, we first hold our breath in sympathy for poor Mrs. Dowey, whose heart is so full of a maternal love for which she has no outlet; then we watch, in admiring suspense, how, by an artful combination of flattery and logic, the old lady gradually convinces Private Dowey that he really wants to stay with her. Even the fact that she is merely "on trial"

1. "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals," Echoes of the War, p. 29.



with him, so to speak, does not daunt her pathetic joy in at last having someone whom she may consider her own, conditional as the relationship may be.

The characteristic skill of the dramatist is displayed in the development of Private Dowey's feeling toward Mrs. Dowey, from anger, at first, to pity, then toleration of being cared for, kindness, and, in the end, real filial love. The "old lady" is, of course, the chief character, and into her portrayal Barrie has put all the conscious artistry, all the intuitive knowledge of women, that he has at his command. If Mrs. Dowey appears amusing and appealing at the first of the play, she is, in the end, pathetically heroic. Nothing could be more sweetly sad than the parting scene between Mrs. Dowey and Kenneth, just before the latter returns to the Front. Both of them veil their real feelings under an assumed gaiety, only showing their tense attitude when they think the time for parting has come. Private Dowey says:<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Dowey, you queer carl, you spunky tiddy, have I your permission to ask you the most important question a neglected orphan can ask of an old lady?

She bubbles with mirth. Who could help it, the man has such a way with him.

None of your sauce, Kenneth.

For a long time, Mrs. Dowey, you cannot have been unaware of my sonnish feelings for you.

Wait till I get my mop to you!

.....  
.....

Was I a well-behaved infant, mother?

Not you, sonny, you were a rampaging rogue.

1. "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals." Echoes of the War, p. 59.



Was I slow in learning to walk?

The quickest in our street. He! He!  
He! (She starts up) Was that the whistle?

The closing scene of the play, which shows Mrs. Dowey looking at the medals of her dead son, is a gem of dramatic workmanship, in its effective portrayal of the mingled grief and quiet triumph of this old lady who has at last given something to the carrying on of the war, who has had a share in the feelings of others, even though at the cost of infinite personal pain. It is indeed a scene of which one might truly say, "I could no more help crying than I could help breathing":<sup>1</sup>

.....It would be rosemary to us to see her in her black dress, of which she is very proud; but let us rather peep at her in the familiar garments that make a third to her mop and pail. It is early morning, and she is having a look at her medals before setting off on the daily round. They are in a drawer, with the scarf covering them, and on the scarf a piece of lavender. First, the black frock, which she carries in her arms like a baby. Then her War Savings Certificates, Kenneth's bonnet, a thin packet of real letters, and the famous champagne cork. She kisses the letters but she does not blub over them. She strokes the dress, and waggles her head over the certificates and presses the bonnet to her cheeks, and rubs the tinsel of the cork carefully with her apron. She is a tremulous old 'un; yet she exults, for she owns all these things, and also the penny flag in her breast. She puts them away in the drawer, the scarf over them, the lavender on the scarf. Her air of triumph well becomes her. She lifts the pail and the mop, and slouches off gamely to the day's toil.<sup>2</sup>

In the treatment of the one-act play, Barrie seems already to have reached his highest point. His latest plays have shown a deterioration, the beginnings of which are especially noticeable in Pantaloons. Barrie uses here the device of permitting the actors to

1. Phelps, W.L., "The Plays of J.M. Barrie," Yale Review, January, 1920, p. 413.

2. "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals," Echoes of the War, p. 62.



address the audience, which, according to B. H. Clark, "is in principle the vaudeville method of establishing relations between the stage and the "house."<sup>1</sup> Pantaloон, turning to the audience after having successfully coaxed Columbine and Harlequin to laugh at him, says,<sup>2</sup> 'If the public only knew how anxiously we listen for the laugh, they would be less grudging of it.' The lessening of dramatic worth evidenced in this and other plays is largely a matter of a decline from sentiment to sentimentality on Barrie's part,--a decline which becomes apparent when one compares the different kinds of emotion displayed in Quality Street and Pantaloон.

"'Quality Street' is for the quality," says Dixon Scott.<sup>3</sup> And how true this is, one needs only to catch a glimpse of the genteel, old-fashioned atmosphere of the home of the Misses Throssel, to be convinced. The quiet, refined emotion which these two ladies display, is quite in keeping with their characters, and is pleasingly illustrative of Barrie's clear conception of what real sentiment is. But the noisy, over-demonstrative sentiment of Pantaloон, in the scenes with his daughter, seems to indicate that just for a moment Barrie's fine sensibilities had been off their guard, and cheap sentimentality had crept in with the really noble sentiment which Barrie knows so well how to express. This growth downward from sentiment to sentimentality on Barrie's part is a tendency which, if persisted in, will result inevitably in a fatal weakening of his dramatic skill. But if Barrie be judged by those of his one-act plays which are most truly representative of his talent, there is little doubt but that critics of the future will consider him, as those of the present day have done, a master with few rivals in this particular

1. Clark B.H., British and American Drama of Today, p. 168.

2. Half Hours, "Pantaloон" p. 16.

3. Scott, Dixon, Men of Letters, p. 63.



kind of dramatic expression.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In a letter to Barrie, written as early as 1892, Robert Louis Stevenson said: "I am a capable artist, but it begins to look to me as if you were a man of genius."<sup>1</sup> This was meant only in reference to Barrie's stories, for at that time he had won no special renown as a dramatist. However, the same remark applies equally well to his plays. Other dramatists have become popular because of their choice of subjects, or their unique treatment of time-worn themes, or for some other particular reason. But Barrie's rise has been due to no single cause. Rather is it to be attributed to a combination of particular qualities such as these, illumined and made vital by a spark of the "divine fire" which has made his work transcend that of all of his contemporaries.

When Barrie first began to write plays, many critics thought that he had gone outside of his natural field,--that he could not succeed as well in drama - as in story - writing. Even as late in his dramatic career, as 1900, Mr. Hammerton, in the preface to his book on Barrie, remarked:<sup>2</sup>

"It will be noticed that I do not deal in any place with Mr. Barrie as a playwright. As an old student of the acted drama I have no compunction in expressing the opinion that ..... Mr. Barrie is not, and is not likely to be, a serious factor in the contemporary drama.....his genius can best be shaped in books and not in plays."

Subsequent events have shown that Mr. Hammerton was mistaken in his estimate of Barrie's ability. But his erroneous judg-

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1. Stevenson, R.L., Letters and Miscellanies, Vol. XXIV, p. 332.  
 2. Hammerton, J.A., J.M. Barrie and His Books, p. 5.



ment can be justified on the ground that, at the time he wrote, Barrie had produced only a few comparatively unimportant plays, which gave very little hint of the real dramatic genius displayed in the later products of his pen. That he has vindicated his right to the title "dramatist" as well as "novelist," the enthusiastic reception by the public, of any play written by him, bears ample witness. But if further proof be needed, it may be found in the words of dramatic critics, who are fully as enamored of the witchery of Barrie's plays, as the play-going public. In the words of Mr. Howe:<sup>1</sup>

"The remarkable fact about Barrie is that he alone among English men of letters in a century, was able to enter the English theatre and to find an immediate and lasting welcome there." Or again,<sup>2</sup> "It would be impossible, if we wished, to regard him as belonging to the genus novelist in the theatre; for when he came to enter it, he found himself to be perfectly at home."

Whether Barrie is a greater novelist than dramatist, would be a difficult question to decide; nor would it be especially valuable, for a knowledge of the man and what he has accomplished. He is a master in both fields; and in the drama, with which we are chiefly concerned here, he is a unique and resplendent figure.

He never preaches, yet his plays are, in themselves, sermons of sane wholesomeness and joy. He makes no claims to intellectual superiority, yet one feels immeasurably small and ignorant before this man, who knows the human heart so thoroughly. And, because he does know and love men and women, he has written plays which, long after the events of this age have been forgotten, will live on simply because of their universal application, their eternal

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1. Howe, Percival P., Dramatic Portraits, p. 115.

2. Ibid, p. 117.



truth, their appreciation of the inconsistencies of human nature, and, withal, their whimsical, fantastic humor, which takes them out of the realm of the commonplace into the fairyland of drama.



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- Peter and Wendy
- Sentimental Tommy
- Tommy and Grizel

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- Alice Sit-By-The-Fire
- Der Tag, 1914
- Echoes of the War (including The Old Lady Shows Her Medals, A Well-Remembered Voice, Barbara's Wedding, and The New Word), 1919.
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## APPENDIX

THE PLAYS OF J. M. BARRIE, WITH DATES  
OF FIRST PERFORMANCE<sup>1</sup>

- Becky Sharp, 1891.
- Ibsen's Ghost, 1891.
- Richard Savage, 1891.
- Walker, London, 1892. (Performed at Herald Square Theater, New York, 1894).
- Jane Annie, 1893.
- The Professor's Love Story, 1894. (Performed at the Star Theater, New York, 1894). (In preparation for publication).
- Seven Women. (In preparation).
- The Little Minister, 1897. (Performed by Maude Adams, on tour, 1897, and later).
- The Wedding Guest, 1900.
- Quality Street, 1902. (Performed by Maude Adams, on tour, 1903. Revived at Empire Theater, New York, 1913).
- The Admirable Crichton, 1902. (Performed, with William Gillette, at Lyceum Theater, New York, 1904).
- Little Mary, 1903. (Performed at Empire Theater, New York, 1904). (In preparation).
- Peter Pan, 1904. (Performed by Maude Adams, on tour, 1906, and in revival, 1918). (In preparation).
- \*Pantaloons, 1905. (Performed at the Criterion Theatre, New York, 1905-6).
- Alice Sit-By-The-Fire, 1905. (Performed by Ethel Barrymore, on tour, 1905-6).
- Josephine, 1906.
- Punch, 1906.
- What Every Woman Knows, 1908. (Performed by Maude Adams at Empire Theatre, 1908, and on tour).

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1. Reprinted from B. H. Clark, British and American Drama of Today.



Old Friends, 1910.

\*The Twelve-Pound Look, 1910. (Performed by Ethel Barrymore on tour, 1911-12).

A Slice of Life, 1910. (Performed by Ethel Barrymore at the Empire Theatre, New York, 1912).

\*Rosalind, 1912.

The Legend of Leonora, 1913. (Performed by Maude Adams on tour, 1913-14).

\*The Will, 1913. (Performed in New York, 1913).

(No dates of first performance could be obtained for the following plays).

Der Tag. ("The Tragic Man"), 1914.

\*\*The New Word.

\*\*The Old Lady Shows Her Medals.

\*\*Barbara's Wedding.

\*\*A Well-Remembered Voice.

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\*The plays in this list indicated thus, \*, were published collectively, under the title Half Hours, by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1914.

\*\*Those indicated thus, \*\*, were published under the title Echoes of the War, by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1919.





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